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Stumped? Ask your Mac

At Colgate-Palmolive, software gives computers a mind of their own

BY JAMES DALY
CW STAFF

NEW YORK — When was the last time your personal computer actually thought for you? How about an easier one: Has your PC ever plucked a useful piece of information out of an obscure source you never dreamed of tapping into? Don't all answer at once.

In one lucky division at Colgate-Palmolive Co., however, this is getting to be a common occurrence, with a network of Apple Computer, Inc. Macintoshes.

"Too often in the past, we've been limited by the way a system has been designed, and we needed to change that," said Frank Morelli, director of the company's customer support, marketing and management systems. "Our managers knew what they wanted, but they didn't know where it resided or even how to access it."

Morelli's solution was Muse, an innovative data-analysis application from Watertown, Mass.-based Occam Research Corp. that has become a key part of the way Colgate-Palmolive maps its global business strategy. Muse links an internal database engine with a data dictionary and natural-language querying

capabilities to let Morelli's marketing managers pull in data from a wide variety of sources — even those they never considered accessing.

These managers are continually working to spot trends and pinpoint opportunities for growth, employing Muse to interactively analyze financial and market data about hundreds of consumer products sold by Colgate in about 160 countries.

Putting away the shovels

Muse combines the power of a relational database with seamlessly integrated analytical tools, allowing its users to easily gather and graph the data for instant ad-hoc analysis. "I can see trends in just a few minutes now — I don't have to dig for them," Morelli said.

In the past, category marketing managers had to hack through thousands of Microsoft Corp. Excel spreadsheets in order to pull up disparate sales data. "While all the information was there, it often was delivered across many different spreadsheets that they would need to cut and paste and consolidate," said Lynne Tapper, a senior consultant.

Because there was so much information, it could sometimes take analysts hours to find what they were looking for.

ON SITE



Colgate-Palmolive Co.
New York, N.Y.

- **Challenges:** Interactively analyze financial and market data about hundreds of consumer products. Reduce time required to study data while more efficiently spotting trends and opportunities.

- **Technology:** Occam Research Corp.'s Muse, an executive information and data analysis tool running over a network of Apple Computer, Inc. Macintosh computers.

- **Results:** Reduced data analysis time while letting users gain a new understanding of information's interrelationship.

"We had a lot of market information available, but it was sometimes difficult to make sense of it," Morelli said.

Muse's first advantage was simple yet

very important — it could understand commands in plain English. If you wanted to know how many tubes of toothpaste were sold in France in the first quarter, that is exactly what you would ask it. "You ask what you'd like to know as if you were talking to someone standing beside you," Morelli said.

Users can then even animate the data to produce a time-line chart.

Morelli said that in order to build natural-language queries, both the data and the query must be created separately. These queries are then saved, reused and shared on a server.

Muse's powerful relational data manager imports data in a variety of formats, from simple text to mainframe SQL databases. The data used in Muse is elec-

tronically collected from global subsidiaries and placed on an IBM mainframe running MVS

in the New York office. The marketing personnel access Muse-related information through a series of Apple Computer, Inc. Macintoshes running over a 3Com Corp. twisted-pair network.

The data is organized in Databooks containing multiple tables of data. The Databooks are joined automatically so that many of them can be referenced at once. If a marketing manager asks for sales in a given region during the past three years and notices that they are rising, he may want further information and may need to know who the major contributors are — or which countries in the region were losers. That is when the inter-

active linking of Muse data kicks in.

With these answers in mind, the manager can explore further. Particularly helpful are the "what-if" reporting features. "It's something you can't do with a traditional spreadsheet-type system because those are really limited by access techniques," Morelli said.

To the user, the whole appearance is a single large pool of data that can be accessed and analyzed on the fly. Add to that the knockout punch of being able to pull up information lurking in the background that the user never considered.

"We're finding information and relationships that we never really thought of going after," Morelli said. "You can't ask for more help than that."